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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000089

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WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCICK
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH
SAO PAOLO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2016

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SUBJECT: TINUBU CHARTS THE AC'S COURSE IN THE ELECTION

REF: 06 LAGOS 1398

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 29 conversation with the Consul General, Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu stated he would suggest to his old friend Vice-President Atiku Abubakar to step down from the presidential race. Tinubu thinks his friend's chances are nil given the strength of presidential enmity against Atiku. In place of Atiku, Tinubu wants an Action Congress (AC) ticket of House Speaker Aminu Masari and Senate President Ken Nnamani (Both are currently in the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP)). Tinubu predicted the GON will manipulate the election to assure the PDP's Umaru Yar'Adua's victory. Tinubu blamed the failure of an AC-All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) merger squarely on the imperious behavior of ANPP candidate Muhammadu Buhari. Tinubu remained confident the AC would retain its Lagos power base. The Lagos Governor foresaw mass protests in Lagos should the PDP attempt to "steal" the State on election day. End summary.

Tinubu Proposes a New AC Ticket to Atiku

¶2. (C) In a January 29 conversation with the Consul General, Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu quipped President Obasanjo and his aides have mishandled Vice-President Atiku. By publicly berating Atiku and trying to drive him from office by visiting indignity after indignity on him, the Government has generated more sympathy for Atiku than he could have done himself. While they publicly cheer the powerful, the Nigerian people sympathize with the underdog in their hearts, explained Tinubu. By stripping Atiku of the endowments of office, Obasanjo has turned the Vice-President into such an underdog in the hearts of many. Wisdom would have counseled the PDP to handle the Atiku affair with finesse; however, with delicacy being a concept alien to the minds of Obasanjo and his top political advisors, they have sought to publicly browbeat Atiku. In doing so, they have generated more bad will for themselves, contended Tinubu.

¶3. (C) Despite what he saw as Atiku's growing popularity, Tinubu characterized himself as a realist who grasped the ineluctable fact Obasanjo would never allow Atiku the presidency. With this in mind, Tinubu planned to travel to Abuja accompanied by a hefty morsel of an unsolicited and potentially unwelcome proposal for his friend Atiku. Tinubu would ask Atiku to eschew his presidential ambitions and assume the role of "statesman or guardian of democracy". Instead of running for office, Atiku would convert himself into a campaigner for free and fair elections, for the end of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as the majority party and, of course, for a new Action Congress (AC) presidential ticket that would assure economic development and further democratization, according to Tinubu.

¶4. (C) Tinubu would suggest a new AC ticket of House Speaker Aminu Masari from Katsina State and Senate President Ken Nnamani from Enugu State. Both are currently PDP members but both are also very disenchanted with party machinations at the national level and within their respective states. The two lawmakers are well respected by fellow Assembly colleagues. Such a ticket would fortify the National Assembly against further intrigue by the Presidency, increasing its independence, Tinubu asserted. Tinubu predicted members of the National Assembly maltreated by the PDP in the primaries would gravitate to the AC and help the party shore its base if this ticket could be established.

¶5. (C) A Masari-Nnamani ticket would also garner a lot of public support as both men have been seen as competent in their roles, Tinubu reasoned. Many PDP and All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP) partisans, infuriated over how presidential candidates in their parties were chosen behind closed doors, might migrate to the AC. However, Tinubu did not know if Atiku would accept his proposal. (Comment: An old friend of Atiku, Tinubu will be placing a lot of strain

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on their friendship if he follows through on his idea. Atiku seems committed to running and having already inhaled the scent of the campaign trail might prove reluctant to stop now. While the proposed new ticket has some attraction, it is improbable. Both Masari and Nnamani are in the PDP. Defection to the AC would jeopardize their National Assembly leadership positions as well as scuttle any possible settlement regarding their post-election roles currently being negotiated with the PDP hierarchy. End comment)

Tinubu Warns of PDP Election Overreach

¶6. (C) Notwithstanding his enthusiasm for a new AC ticket, Tinubu thought victory improbable because the PDP was determined to "cook the books" so Umaru Yar'Adua could win the presidency. Tinubu, a long time associate of Yar'Adua's deceased brother General Shehu Yar'Adua, surprisingly said he had no problem with a Yar'Adua victory and the two were good friends. Lagos would not erupt if Yar'Adua won. Lagosians nor most southwesterners would not take to the streets to protest for Buhari or Atiku for that matter, he measured.

¶7. (C) However, Tinubu foresaw a problem if the PDP tried to claim too many state, local, and federal offices they actually did not win in the election. This would force the various opposition parties into a dilemma where they would have to accept abject surrender or to unite in protest against a PDP power arrogation. If the PDP tried to "steal" the Lagos governorship, Lagos would ignite, Tinubu forecasted. However, if the PDP allowed the ANPP to increase the number of its northern governorships and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) to win a couple of governorships in the Southeast, there would be no generalized national unrest, Tinubu postulated.

¶18. (C) While talks between the AC and ANPP continue, they have been desultory. An AC-ANPP alliance was at best a long shot, Tinubu commented. Expressing scant regard for Buhari's political skills, Tinubu placed the failure at the feet of ANPP presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari. Tinubu, a southern Muslim, gauged Buhari as a land-locked northern candidate with little appeal across the south, where most people saw him as a religious bigot and regional chauvinist. Buhari was more intolerant than Obasanjo, charged Tinubu. Buhari also was being ill-served by a corps of second-rate advisers with a narrow vision of what Nigeria should be, Tinubu remarked.

¶19. (C) Tinubu's sources within the PDP told him Obasanjo wanted Buhari to win the ANPP nomination so the PDP could beat him again. Obasanjo hoped that a second defeat would destroy Buhari's political future but also demonstrate that a person of Buhari's northern chauvinistic ilk could no longer lay claim to the national mantle. Consequently, to set the stage for this epic battle against this perceived embodiment of northern supremacy, Obasanjo actively pressured ANPP governors to withdraw their claim for the party nomination so Buhari could have it.

¶110. (C) Tinubu claimed that a few days before the ANPP national convention, northern governors received visits from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), in a situation similar to what happened to southern governors vying for the PDP presidential nomination. The investigations ended when the ANPP governors sidelined themselves so Buhari could win the ticket. Now that Buhari has the nomination, Obasanjo is putting similar pressure on ANPP governors to not fund Buhari's campaign. According to Tinubu, Buhari's will be a cash-strapped campaign if ANPP governors do not contribute.

AC Stabilizes and Consolidates in Lagos

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¶111. (C) Tinubu commented that after initial defections from the party over its nomination of Babatunde Fashola for the Lagos gubernatorial race, the party has stabilized and actually gained ground against the PDP. For instance, the AC has attracted disgruntled elements of the PDP in Lagos state. Adeseye Ogunlewe, former Federal Minister of Works and once ardent Tinubu opponent, has now joined the AC. Several key advisors of the late Funsho Williams have also defected from the PDP to the AC, Tinubu beamed. These defections have brought a large part of the Williams' campaign machinery with them. The Williams faction was the largest in the Lagos State PDP. Without it, the PDP in Lagos will be crippled, explained the Governor. Tinubu predicted Fashola would win 70 percent of the Lagos vote.

¶112. (C) Tinubu was also negotiating with Hilda Williams, Funsho's widow, about cooperating with the AC. Hilda believed she won the Lagos PDP primary but had victory snatched from her by legerdemain. According to Tinubu, PDP gubernatorial candidate Senator Musiliu Obanikoro has been dating Obasanjo's daughter Iyabo, now running for a senate seat in Ogun State. According to Tinubu, Iyabo convinced her father to intervene on behalf of Obanikoro. (Comment: Once a close associate of Tinubu, Obanikoro defected from the Alliance for Democracy (AD) to the PDP. Tinubu's opinion of the Senator is obviously biased. While Tinubu's attribution of Obanikoro's primary victory may be touched by malice, Tinubu's claim to have won over much of Williams' camp has been verified. End comment.)

Comment

¶13. (C) A realist, Tinubu does not envision an Atiku victory despite his long years of friendship to the Vice-President. Tinubu's estimation that the election results will be significantly manipulated unfortunately stands as a realistic appraisal. While we think his idea of a Masari-Nnamani ticket intriguing, it also belies his usual pragmatism. This is the political equivalent of pulling a rabbit out of a hat. It would take magic. Returning to a more pragmatic mode, Tinubu's assessments of the AC-ANPP alliance and of Buhari's cachet in the south are sound.

¶14. (C) While recent defections from the PDP in Lagos have mended some of the tears in the fabric of the AC in Lagos, Tinubu's optimism about the race is inflated. The PDP is almost salivating over Lagos and will do its utmost to win here. While Tinubu believes the result is foregone, a more objective observer would assert the battle for the State has just started. Finally, Tinubu's prediction of political unrest if the PDP overreaches is significant. He sees violence in the south more likely to occur as a response to disputed gubernatorial and local races, rather than in reaction to the presidential outcome. End comment.

BROWNE